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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply “carrying on the fight,” but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: review_editor@platypus1917.org. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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he found himself in the minority, he amended his view of him as “one of the sternest disciplinarians.” But when a martinet. His hagiographer Isaac Deutscher speaks of idea of the militarization of labor, and was something of phasized centralism above everything else, backed the “non-factional”. After he joined the Bolsheviks, he em- tionary strategy and tactics, while promoting himself as the building of an organization united around a revolu- workers’ initiative. Similarly, he opposed as factionalist pose an “orthodox theocracy” and to erect obstacles to- tionists.” He denounced Bolsheviks as seeking to im- and centralism and talked of the Bolsheviks as “substi- joined the Bolsheviks, he usually opposed party-building mainly identified it as centralism. In the years before he party-building and demanding it, but either way he ing. Over the years he vacillated between denouncing Trotsky never had a clear conception of party-build- practices are not very far apart.

from Stalinist rhetoric on the monolithic party, but their for decades. Trotskyist rhetoric on factions is different Trotskyist sectarianism has been notorious on the Left side the party and in their internal life. Similarly, tional practices, both in their relations with those out- Stalinist parties are known for their repulsive organiza-

Party Concept

serve, rather than undermine, the capitalist system. tion of banks and of other state takeovers in order to pre- talist governments make use of the temporary nationaliza- market fundamentalism. But even today, conservative capi- capitalist system takes. It might seem plausible in these days of view makes it hard to understand the different forms that the class nature of the consolidated Stalinist economy. His geois economics. This is partly why he could not understand mon with Stalinism, old-style reformism, and even bour- Trotsky holds his glorified view of nationalization in com- bus an airplane gives the bus the ability to fly.

them or the situation no more transitional than calling a ism. Simply calling one’s demands “transitional” makes times, it indicates at most a change in the form of capital- really might help undermine the bourgeoisie. But at other tionary movement is growing, extensive nationalization capitalist society is crumbling and the revolu- nopoly capitalist interest. In a transitional situation, when or it may be a bourgeois scheme in the service of mo- useful reform that provides more services to the masses, still have large state sectors. Nationalization may be a these days of rampant privatization, capitalist economies But ordinary bourgeois economies do too, indeed, even in occur. A social revolution will make use of nationalization different circumstances in which these different types In fact there are different types of nationalization and strike a blow against the foundations of capitalism. bourgeois regime.” He thought nationalization would sively they will be directed against the very basis of the is continued in the fact that “ever more openly and deci- “a system of *transitional demands*.” The essence of these

socialist society, replacing the “minimum program” with achieved under capitalism and a “maximum program” of mum program” of reforms which might conceivably be Marxist division of working-class demands into a “mini- Natioanlization was also a key part of Trotsky’s fa- mous transitional program. Trotsky denounced the ism because it involved “the socialization of production.” dusty, which he mistakenly believed went beyond capital- dics capitalist relations,” with the nationalization of in- the 8-hour day, as something which “by no means contra- country. In *Results and Prospects* (1906) Trotsky contrasted socialistic about the state sector in a market capitalist sesed. But Trotskyism also holds that there is something to regimes where the old bourgeoisies has been dispos- In their theorizing of ugly workers’ states, Trotskyists refer

State Ownership

as a unified whole, a point of view similar to Cliff’s. He thus implies that the state sector essentially operated tional capital” approach in analyzing the Soviet economy. for decades. It might be advocated the “na- manifest anarchy of production? On one page he gives he says on one page is contradicted on the next. Did it traditions. Was the Stalinist economy centralized? What ance on Trotsky’s writings leads him into a series of con- within itself, not simply from foreign trade. But his reli- Daum tries to show that the system’s evils arise from “stified capitalism,” his name for state-capitalism. by returning to Trotsky; Daum put forward a theory of for the Revolutionary Party attempted to go beyond Cliff *Resurrection of Marxist Theory* Walter Daum of the League In his 1990 book *The Life and Death of Stalinism: A* were not the main source of the anarchy in its economy. Cliff, internal class contradictions in the Soviet Union needed to trade with the outside capitalist world. For socialist economy should, had the Soviet Union not nomic system would have operated in a unified way as a socialist in and of itself. He held that the Stalinist eco- Trotskyists, Cliff still saw state ownership as essentially Union as state-capitalist. Despite this, like other the Socialist Workers Party (UK) regarded the Soviet ugly workers’ state. In particular, the late Tony Cliff of Some Trotskyists do not agree with the theory of the trust” that the Stalinist system had engendered. ? promised Trotskyist support in eliminating the “mis- into the party leadership in exchange for which he the Soviet Communist Party to allow Trotskyists back 1933 he addressed a secret appeal to the leadership of ship”—that was Trotsky’s program. Indeed, as late as nomic and social system, just give it “Trotskyist leader- Russia, not a “social revolution.” Don’t change the eco- *Betrayed* (1936) he called for a “political revolution” in workers’ state. In his famous work *The Revolution* means of production showed that the Soviet Union was geisie was no longer in power, state ownership of the Trotsky himself held that given that the tsarist bour- all the usual capitalist categories (profit, rent, interest, etc.) that the state sector is socialist even if it runs according to argued vehemently in his 1926 book *The New Economics*

Indeed, the eminent Trotskyist Yevgeni Preobrazhensky They view state ownership as socialistic in and of itself, no But that is not the way it is seen by most Trotskyists. was capitalist, albeit a new form of capitalism. taken by a faulty leadership. Instead its economic basis cialistic economy combined with poor political decisions sector. The Stalinist system didn’t consist of a good, so- political issue: It affected the economic nature of the state lack of workers’ control over the state sector wasn’t just a state ministries and split the ruling officialdom. Thus, the the state sector itself. Private interests fought within the group interests at the expense of the general interest. Indeed, this anarchy and competition was evident in small- production, with the incessant clash of competing small- cialism. Their economies were ravaged by the anarchy of by the state, these countries lacked the social control of capitalist regimes. Despite the domination of the economy wards it, and we think this holds true for all the state- the Castroist system in Cuba, we found that they differed economically from both socialism and any transition to- But in our studies of the Stalinist system in Russia and system that should never be implemented again. and political murders, etc.—occurred on an economic basis of socialism. If so, this suggests that socialism was a failed system that should never be implemented again.

What’s the overall economic and class nature of such a class controlled neither the economy nor the state. tor of the economy was dominant, and yet the working politics and economics of the Soviet Union. The state sec- time in the 1930s, the working class had lost control of the communism into a world movement. However, by some- This electrified workers around the world, making Leninist lutionary workers to replace capitalism with socialism. history. It gave rise to the first protracted attempt by revo- The Bolshevik Revolution was a turning point in world workers’ states just the same.

regimes in vehement terms, but insist that they are

One way that most Trotskyist groups echo Stalinism is in their defense of oppressive regimes that claim to be socialist as workers’ states. They denounce the Stalinist

The Ugly Workers’ State

principles in the name of opposing Western imperialism. the name of opposing Stalinism, or dropping democratic with the bathwater. It is as bad as dropping socialism in be what it claims to be, Leninism. This throws out the baby some other groups, but the critics often take Trotskyism to year directed against the Socialist Workers Party (UK) and it is criticized. There has been a good deal of outrage this that. How it is criticized is, therefore, as important as that part a theoretical and ideological crisis, and Trotskyism as movements derives not only from weakness. It is in large The present crisis in the Marxist and working-class after issue the differences are only skin-deep. imperialism.” Despite the different catchwords, on issue edly supported vicious dictatorships in a parody of “anti- the Castroist system in Cuba, we found that they differed carticture of centralism than was that of the old Stalinist structure of many Trotskyist organizations is no less a (“degenerated” or “deformed”) they may have been. The ist regimes were “workers’ states”, however repulsive ment believes to this day that the Stalinist state-capital- and practice to Stalinism. Most of the Trotskyist move- ment has never established a viable alternative theory serious opponent of Stalinism. Yet the Trotskyist move- agents reinforced the idea that Trotskyism is the most murder of Trotsky and numerous Trotskyists by Stalinist the Stalinist betrayal of socialist principles. The savage Trotskyism purports to be the Leninist answer to communist work among the working class.”

Trotskyism purports to be the Leninist answer to but also from what we have seen as we have carried out This conclusion stems not just from theoretical study, that Trotskyism is in large part the flip side of Stalinism. only differs from the old Stalinist critique, but also shows developed over the years a critique of Trotskyism that not in the anti-revisionist journal, *Communist Voice*. We have which I and others have dealt with in a number of articles A detailed study of Trotskyist theory is a large topic,

Joseph Green

A new assessment of Trotskyism as the flip side of Stalinism

The Platypus Review

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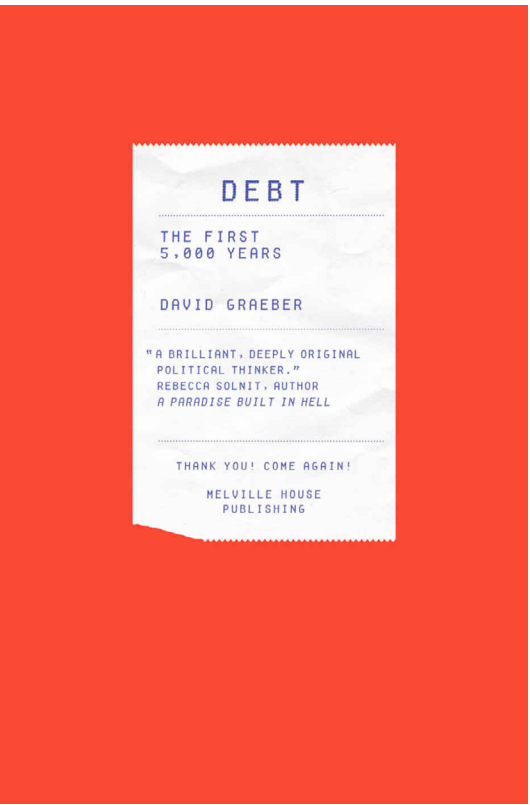
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Cap on debt

Book Review: David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. New York: Melville House, 2012.

Peter Bierl



LIKE MANY CRITICS OF GLOBALIZATION, David Graeber does not seem to understand what capitalism is. Otherwise he would not emphasize time and again that a market economy is something fundamentally different, as he does in his book, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. Graeber's distinction fits with a lot of left-wing currents, from old-fashioned anarchists in the tradition of Proudhon to young militants of Attac. All too many people assume that capitalism simply means financial speculation, intransparent bank dealings, monopolies, or interest as a way to garner income without work, all of which place a burden on the middle class. A market economy, on the other hand, is associated with "honest" labor and fair exchange.

Sociologically, this has been the ideology of a petty-bourgeois middle class—of small artisans, merchants, peasants, self-employed doctors, attorneys, engineers, public officials, high-salaried workers, and skilled la-

borers—since Proudhon coined the famous phrase, "property is theft." Of course, his fans often willingly overlook the fact that Proudhon aimed at people who exploit others by lending money for interest, and that he blamed the Jews especially for doing so.

In *Debt*, which has drawn praise from bourgeois reviewers and parts of the Left, Graeber begins by stating that we do not know what debt really means (5). He distinguishes debt and credit: Debts are abstract and quantifiable, establish "simple, cold and impersonal" relationships between human beings, are connected with coined money, and are based on violence, whereas credits imply personal, emotional relationships and moral foundations, as if they were some sort of mutual aid or charity (13, 21).

In the beginning of human history, Graeber claims, people made gifts reciprocally or gave things away on simple and non-quantifiable credit. Throughout the book, Graeber describes long cycles of history in which societies based on credit alternate with those based on money and debt.

Graeber skips around between ages and continents as he sees fit. When he wants to prove that adscript peasants were indeed well off since they did not have to supply their produce to townspeople, he points to sparsely populated Europe. When he wants to make us believe that the Middle Ages were an absolutely peaceful era, he declares Europe, with its eternal feuds among its noblemen, as irrelevant and points to Asia (297). Of course, the ruling powers in the Islamic world as well as in India and China waged endless war against each other and against their subjects too.

However, what is worse is the book's simplified theory. Graeber forces 5,000 years of human history into a dichotomous schema of "human economies" vs. "military-coincage-slavery-complexes" (229). Dark periods during which states ruled with the help of standing armies, which the rulers paid with coined money, take turns with peaceful periods of manageable market economies with limited government intervention. In the latter, goods and people were exchanged on mutual credit or through "social currencies" that were in turn based on trust and common values.

In his "human economies," women were exchanged by men like cattle, yet Graeber does not see any oppres-

sion, domination, or exploitation at work. Rather, he calls it "regulation," since by marrying the woman the man was taking on responsibility; he was not buying the woman herself but rather the right to her progeny. Graeber tries to reassure the reader (131). It is precisely this, however, that constitutes an essential element of patriarchal domination. Men subdued and owned women, controlled their bodies, and restricted their sexuality to make sure that it was him and no one else who was the father of her children. Instead of regarding this relationship critically, Graeber sugarcoats: that the man was not paying with money but with "social currencies," like shells (or cattle), is evidence to him that no act of purchase has taken place. The non-monetary consideration was only meant symbolically and was supposed to express that each woman was so unique that her value could not be measured with money.

Graeber wants us to believe that such "regulations" were only corrupted through money, and debts that are expressed through money, because now debt had become measurable and the debtors were brought dishonor. According to Graeber, our sense of justice was reduced to the language of business, and our moral responsibilities to our fellow human beings reduced to debt. Morals were thus transformed into an "impersonal arithmetic" (14).

Graeber even relativizes such brutal forms of exploitation and domination as persisted in the Indian caste system. He says that in the Middle Ages, when the great empires in India fell apart the independent village came into existence. While its structure may have been strictly hierarchically organized, Graeber argues, it did not know any coin money. The status of the untouchables within the caste system in these villages was bearable, because "the exaction of local landlords was, again, on nothing like the same scale as that under earlier governments" (255).

Likewise, Graeber romanticizes the empire of China and its Confucian officials as guardians of a thriving market economy. In fact, however, peasants repeatedly revolted against their lot in this exploitative society. Graeber praises khalfis and sultans for suppressing debt bondage and not intervening in the economy, all of this backed up by the Qur'an (1275–282, 303). Slaves mostly served as trappings in the Islamic world, Graeber asserts, thus suggesting they were not really mistreated or exploited (274).

Bankers and *conquistadores* destroyed this paradise of medieval market economies, and society was once again marked by money, interest, and debt instead of credit for charity's sake in a human economy. Like Proudhonists and right-wing "folkish" demagogues since the days of the German emperor William I, Graeber wants us to believe that capitalism is a only matter of interest, of usury, a term that was coined in the Middle Ages in Europe against money-lending and the money-lenders, who were usually identified as Jews.

Graeber, like Proudhon before him, suggests that bad capitalism could be transformed into a good market economy if only interest and the state were abolished.

Just like other apologists of a market economy without capitalism, Graeber overlooks their inner correla-

tion. In many societies, products are exchanged on the market. The market mechanism can be combined with slave economies or feudal economies that generate little surplus. During the High Middle Ages, the market economic sector was entrenched within and limited by a feudal agrarian economy. This sector was either fed by surpluses produced by artisans or peasants, or by textiles and metals that were produced through wage labor, while overseas trade connected large parts of the world. This market economy was linked to brutal European expansion measures already since the age of the crusades. Such a combination created a dynamic that led to the emergence of modern capitalism. A market economy always signifies production of exchange-value under competitive conditions for which use-value is only a means to an end. This leads to wage labor becoming a commodified and regulated way of exploiting alien labor as well as to the exploitation and destruction of the environment. A market economy is not static but dynamic, especially during periods of technical progress that regularly divide those involved into winners and losers. The ruin of many and the expansion of a few corporations are just as much triggered by the laws of the market as are the crises that have been haunting society since the early days of industrial capitalism. In pre-industrial and pre-capitalist societies, crises meant that there was lack of commodities on account of war, plague, drought, or other natural disasters. In a predominantly industrial society structured by the laws of the market, crises cause hardship and poverty within a world of abundance.

Graeber flatly dissociates communism and anarchism without distinguishing between different currents. Instead he trivializes communism as a fundamental human behavior pattern, as a give-and-take among family and neighbors. Already in his 2009 book, *Direct Action*, he reduces anarchism to an "mutual exchange between inspirational visions," to "a process of purification, inspiration, and experiment," and "a kind of...creative play." Graeber distances himself from "classical" anarchism because of its militancy, its atheism, and its search for a coherent theory. Instead, he identifies arbitrariness with regards to content and "anarchist spirituality," such as "feminist paganism," as the trademarks of the current movement.²

He argues that the world was exploited by financial elites with the help of corrupt governments, and suggests that the debt crisis was merely a sly political instrument with which neoliberal technocrats were holding down social movements, particularly the labor movement. He no longer holds the appropriation of surplus value, which human labor power creates in the production process and which needs to be realized on the market, as essential. Rather, exploitation to Graeber means primarily the doings of the financial elite, who talk us into acquiring credit, its all the while driving us into a modern interest-slavery.³

If Graeber would take the trouble to read the business section of bourgeois newspapers, he would see that the actually existing capitalism was still all about material

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Internationalism fails

Chris Cutrone

The "anti-imperialist Left" considers itself opposed to all U.S. government action as "imperialist" on principle. But, as Trotsky wrote to his followers in 1938, "Learn to think!" while one may oppose the government politically, to oppose the government putting out a fire, especially when there is no alternative agency for doing so, is nonsense. But the "Left" today is not the inheritor of Trotsky, but rather of what he pitilessly assailed, the policy of the Stalinist "Popular Front Against War and Fascism" of the 1930s, for which the shibboleth was, "Which side are you on?"

The idea is that the defeat of imperialist policy creates possibility for an alternative, and therefore one must always be against imperialism to be on the side of an alternative to it. Historically, Marxists have understood such a strategy in terms of either "revolutionary defeatism" or "revolutionary defensism." Simply put, the defeat of an imperialist power is seen as providing the possibility for a political alternative to the government of the imperialist country; whereas the defense of a country against imperialist attack is seen as providing the possibility for a political alternative in the subaltern country. Importantly, these are not pacifist positions against war, but rather political military strategies in time of war, moreover with the aim of *revolution*.

Historically, there are two examples of success of these strategies of revolutionary defeatism and revolutionary defensism: the role of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution is regarded as a success of revolutionary defeatism, in which the defeat of the Tsarist Russian Empire undermined the government and gave rise to political and social revolution; and Mao's Communists in the Chinese Revolution, in which the defense of China against Japanese imperialist attack undermined the nationalist Kuomintang and allowed for Communist-led revolution. The point of revolutionary defensism was to be better defenders of the country than the nationalists could be, in that the nationalists, in upholding the nation-state as such, must necessarily compromise with global capitalism—"imperialism"—in ways the Communists, as anti-capitalist, would not. This did not mean to be better nationalists than the nationalists. Socialism, let alone Marxism, was not meant to be a political ideology of "national liberation," but rather of global political and social transformation, which was meant to better—and indeed truly, because more fundamentally able to—meet the needs of liberation from national oppression under capitalism.

Today, such specificities and true horizons of politics of social emancipation are lost in the "anti-imperialism" of the pseudo-"Left." Today's "Left" has more in common with the Indian National Army (INA), which sought help from the Japanese against the British during WWII. But this was not the Communist but rather the fascist version of "anti-imperialism." It should not be the Left's. [Indeed, Hitler hosted INA leader Subhas Chandra Bose in Berlin as a fellow "anti-imperialist."] As the Burmese nationalist Aung San, father of democratic activist Aung San Suu Kyi, put it, "The British sucked our blood, but the Japanese ground our bones." Mao and his Chinese Communist Party celebrated their WWII allies U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The German and Japanese national-fascist oppositions to the U.K. and U.S.-led global capitalist "imperialist" order were no good. Neither are today's oppositions.

The question today is whether supposed "revolutionary" defeatism in the U.S. and "revolutionary" defensism in the targets of its military interventions, for example, will actually lead to socialist revolution or any kind of beneficial outcome in either the U.S. or those countries it attacks.

The Left must ask: What might be the actual political effects of a defeat for the U.S.?

It is a mistake perpetuated by the 1960s-era New



Indian nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose meets Adolf Hitler

Left, with its experience of the Vietnam anti-war movement, that somehow imperialist counterinsurgency must necessarily fail. Indeed, historically, counterinsurgencies have been far more successful than unsuccessful. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 was quelled; so were the Taiping and Boxer Rebellions of 1850–64 and 1899–1901. The Boers were subdued in 1880–81 and 1899–1902. The U.K. maintained control of Iraq in the 1930s–40s;

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the most important features of the contemporary world. Let me give a few examples.

Imperialism: Many features of world imperialism have changed dramatically over the last century. Imperialism still exists and devours millions upon millions of people through war, sanctions, propping up brutal regimes, and economic rape. It is as great a monster as ever, but some of the ways imperialism manifests itself have changed. For example, at one time the majority of the world's population lived in colonies and semi-colonies, while today a majority of the world's population lives in imperialist, would-be imperialist, or major regional powers. In order to build a genuine anti-imperialist movement and uphold the class approach set forth in Lenin's *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* and other works, one has to take account of such changes, not gloss over them.

But the Trotskyist movement tends to assume that only the countries that were imperialist in the past can be imperialist today. They have often given "military, but not political" support to would-be imperialist powers, essentially to one imperialist bloc against another.

Democratizations: In a number of countries in the last several decades, from the old Soviet bloc to the current Arab Spring, long-standing dictatorships fell. This has been a major current of mass struggle, but these regimes were brought down neither by socialist revolution nor by profound democratic social revolutions. Even when protracted armed struggle was involved, the result has been liberalizations or democratizations, not social revolutions. A vicious racist system like apartheid might fall and state-capitalist regimes and other hollowed-out tyrannies collapse, but the immediate results are usually depressing governments that simply join in market fundamentalist frenzy. Yet these struggles are essential steps in the long road towards liberation, and they open the way to a renewed and more conscious class struggle.

The Trotskyist movement has been unable to provide orientation for recent democratizations. Such things are not envisioned in Trotsky's theory of the "permanent revolution."

Thus, in the Arab Spring, various Trotskyist groups only support struggles they imagine as social revolutions that might lead to workers' regimes. Their expectations are repeatedly disappointed, but they never learn from this experience. The Trotskyists have no theoretical basis that would allow them to assess realistically such struggles and judge what revolutionary activists should strive for when socialist revolution is not imminent. This reinforces the Trotskyist tendency to non-class anti-imperialism and leads to opposition to some of the important struggles of our time.

Global warming: The protection of the environment is one of the crucial struggles of our time. Every year the situation becomes more serious. The earth burns, while the bourgeoisie dallies. If something serious is to be accomplished, it is necessary to make the environmental movement into one of the fronts of the class struggle.

It is not enough to oppose the global warming denialists. Bourgeois environmentalism is incapable of dealing with the crisis. Al Gore, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and a number of other establishment figures warn about the danger of global warming and other environmental catastrophes, and that has played a certain role, but they advocate futile market measures that will themselves lead to disaster. Yet even

they waged a successful counter-insurgency against Communists in Malaysia after WWII. The U.S. was successful in rolling back peasant *jacquerie* in South Korea in 1950–53. The Greek Civil War 1944–49 resulted in defeat for the Communist insurgents.

Furthermore, the question of political-military strategy regarding "imperialism" is not exhausted or even well informed by ostensible Left-Right distinctions. The U.S. supported the Maoist Communists in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge, both in and out of power; the U.S. opposed the regime installed by Vietnamese Communist intervention in Cambodia in 1979 by supporting the Khmer Rouge—well after the revelation of the "killing fields"—just as they opposed the USSR-supported regime in Afghanistan by the Mujahideen Islamists. Maoists supported both out of "anti-imperialism," which found the People's Republic of China on the same side as the U.S. against "Soviet imperialism" [also in various wars in Africa]. Most of the "Left" supported Solidarity in Poland as well. In these instances "anti-imperialism" worked: "Soviet imperialism" was defeated, and there was a "revolution" in the USSR and its Eastern European "sphere of influence."

Should we expect something similar today regarding the U.S.-led world order? Will defeat for the U.S. in one of its military campaigns result in its collapse? Hardly.

For it would appear that the only instances in which "anti-imperialism" has ever been successful—including in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions—were when there was military support from a more powerful imperialist power: Germany against Russia in WWI; and the U.S. against Japan in WWII.

The mistake of "anti-imperialism" today is in its neutralization of all national states as existing political actors and as domains of potential political action. We are today well past the political compromises of Stalin's strategy of "socialism in one country."

However, the deeper history of Marxism, before Stalinism, may yet be instructive in certain ways. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht's Spartacus League in WWI Germany was "revolutionary defeatist" regarding the German war policy. They did not regard the greater imperialist powers of the time and their alliance, the U.K., the U.S., France and Russia, as the greater enemies of potential progressive-emancipatory political and social change, but rather "the main enemy is at home" meant the German government. This did not mean that they "sided" with the other imperialist powers, as their political opponents—and ultimate executioners—on the German Right insisted. Neither did Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks side with Germany as the Russian nationalists and their Entente international allies averred. The Provisional Government, overthrown by the Bolshevik-led soviets, fled in a U.K. diplomatic car, but that didn't change the fact that for Lenin and Trotsky the Russian nationalists were the "main enemy." Luxemburg feared the political consequences of Lenin and Trotsky's potential "embrace" of German imperialism in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk—what

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production: about cars, airplanes, computers, cell phones, semiconductors, houses, textiles, medicine, steel, aluminum, raw materials, or foodstuffs. The instruments of the financial markets in the end always refer to profits that need to be earned with commodities or services.

His fondness for market economies may explain Graeber's strange anthropology. Like all his bourgeois fore-runners, he tries to root capitalism in an immutable human nature; therefore, neighborly communism, barter, and hierarchies are three constants in every human society, almost as if they were innate in us. At the beginning of *Debt*, Graeber rightly criticizes the assumption of Adam Smith, and other exponents of classical political economy, that humans are traders from the very start.

However, in the end, even his system of thought is based on the fiction that trade is a natural human behavior, even in prehistoric times without money and debt. This serious contradiction demonstrates how deeply-rooted is the affirmation of a market economy, which in our times means nothing less than capitalism. Graeber naturalizes modes of behavior that are in fact products of economic, social, and political relations. Likewise, he denies that there could ever be a society structured around the communist principle advocated by Marx and Kropotkin that everybody could labor according to his abilities, and each could consume according to his needs (94–102, 385–6).

Instead of analyzing the present-day capitalist economy, with its trends and crises, Graeber deals with the contradictions and problems of our time as if they might be a recurrence of the same 5000-year-old story of debt and shame. He seems not to grasp what has really changed: the restructuring of value-creation chains on a global scale since the 1970s to exploit cheap labor in the Global South as well as crack down on welfare states and higher wages in the North, the impact of microelectronics on production and trade, and the significance of the financial sector, not as master and commander, but as part of a capitalist economy. This leads him to focus on encumbered students, who cannot pay back their credits and will struggle against banks due to a lack of well-paying jobs, as a new revolutionary subject. *Debt* panders to this clientele as Graeber declares debt, and the struggle against it, to be the cardinal point of human history. Suitable for this poor analysis is his rather glib proposal at the end of the book: A cancellation of debts, as described in the Old Testament (390–1). On the whole, Graeber has very little to offer for a new radical left approach. **IP**

Translated by Gregor Baskaz

1. Graeber, *Direct Action*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 216, 221, 22.
2. *Ibid.*, 220.
3. Graeber, "Wenn die Eliten ratlos sind, fragen sie die Anarchisten," *Jungle World*, No. 28, (Dec. 2012); Graeber, "The movement as an end-in-itself," *Platypus Review* 43, Feb. 2012, <http://www.platypus1917.org/2012/01/31/interview-with-david-graeber>.

caused the Bolsheviks' Russian "socialist" opponents to unleash a terrorist campaign against them, bombing Bolshevik Party headquarters and attempting to assassinate Lenin and the German ambassador—but Luxemburg nonetheless endorsed the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution and their soviet government and joined the Third International they led.

The "Left" today is hardly up for the challenge posed by such political necessities, let alone the task of social revolution. "Anti-imperialism" today is not revolutionary but rather counter-revolutionary in that it is a species of the most powerful actually constituted counterrevolutionary political force, nationalism.

"Internationalism" is no longer what it was for Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Internationals, but is rather inter-*nationalism*, that is, conjunctural alliances between nationalists, and not revolutionary *anti-nationalism* as it was historically for socialism and Marxism.

Defeatism and defensism today have no progressive-emancipatory political and social content either, for they are not "revolutionary" in any sense beyond, perhaps, the conventional and superficial one of "regime change." Today's "Left" agrees with the imperialists in their horizon of politics: the existing international system of national states. The "Left" today may be divided among and within the nation-states, between those who "side with" this or that government policy, but they are all on the same side of accommodating global capitalism—imperialism.

There is no real anti-imperialism, but only various forms of compromise with imperialism, which is regarded pejoratively to denounce merely this or that governmental policy, but is accepted at a deeper level as an unshakeable reality. However, historical Marxists once knew that it will not be possible to move beyond it on this basis.² **IP**

- Quoted in Field Marshal Sir William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, Cassell & Co, 2nd edition, 1956.
- See the Platypus Affiliated Society public fora on: "Imperialism: What is it, and why should we be against it?," in January 2007, an edited transcript of which was published in *Platypus Review* 25 (July 2010), available online at: <http://platypus1917.org/2010/07/09/imperialism-what-is-it-why-should-we-be-against-it/>; and "What is imperialism? (What now?)," in April 2013, in *Platypus Review* 59 (September 2013), available online at: <http://platypus1917.org/2013/09/01/what-is-imperialism-what-now/>.

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centralism in the name of democracy to allow for factions that fought for the party's leadership.

Later, when Trotsky formed the Fourth International, its *Statutes* focused mainly on the rights of the International Executive Committee (IEC) and the smaller International Secretariat (IS). Democratic centralism is mentioned, but defined only as submission to the decisions of these bodies. There is, for example, no mention of the elective principle, either with respect to the national Trotskyist organizations or the world leadership of the Fourth International. At most, the *Statutes* say that the "International Conferences" should be composed of the "delegates, or their mandated representatives, of all sections." In practice, the composition of these conferences was decided mainly by the IEC and the IS. True, most Trotskyist organizations have some kind of elections, but Trotsky's legacy leads in the direction of arrogant bureaucracy.

Now, centralism is essential for a party that seriously intends to carry out a revolution. But it is also a notable feature of many bourgeois and reactionary parties. When centralism is detached from the other aspects of a working class party, it becomes oppressive.

Lenin saw centralism and discipline as connected to other aspects of party life and to the level of the class struggle. For example, in "*Left-wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*" (1920), he raised the issue of how the discipline of the proletarian party is maintained and reinforced. One key factor was the devotion to the revolution of the party members, but it was not the only one.

Another was that the party was able to stay "in close touch with, and to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses of the toilers." It was also necessary to have correct political strategy and tactics, and moreover, that "the broadest masses have been convinced by *their own experience*" of this correctness. Thus he viewed the party's internal life and level of discipline as connected not only to the convictions of its members, but also to those of the masses around the party. Lenin warned that "Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end in phrase-mongering and grimacing." (*Ibid.*, Chapter II)

Evolution of the Party

Trotsky's ideas about party-building focused on centralism and the fight for leading positions. Marxism has a broader idea. When Marx and Engels saw that the workers needed to form their own political party if they wished to be free of capitalist exploitation, they focused on what type of party was needed, not just on who was the leader. They sought to build a type of mass organization that had never been seen before. The *Communist Manifesto* (1848) had been written for the Communist League, but it turned out to be too narrowly based. Marx and Engels sought a political organization that was connected to the economic and strike struggles of the workers. The party was also to organize nation-wide political agitation and to bring the workers into all aspects of the revolutionary movement. This was not what political factions or parties previously had been. The First International provided a broader link to mass struggles than the Communist League ever had and inspired workers around the world, but it lacked cohe-

sion, and workers were in large part enrolled in it *en masse*, rather than individually. The parties of the Second International, at their best, were actively involved in political agitation and their members were expected to take more part in party life than was ever known before.

The Leninist Third International went further. At its best, its parties were not simply more centralized than Second International parties, but also fostered more independent activity from their members, more theoretical consciousness, and more participation in revolutionary action. However, these parties were built in a hurry under exceptionally trying conditions, and were not always at their best. Stalinist revisionism eventually corroded them, but before that they allowed the working class to become a political force in a way never seen before.

If I and others support party-building, it is because we have seen that party organization empowers class-conscious activists and workers. The party-like organizations I have been in, such as the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA of 1980–1973, were not perfect, but they unleashed our potentialities as well as those of the workers and students we worked among, in a way other organizations had not. Small and limited as the organizations of the last period have been, they gave voice to a revolutionary standpoint not otherwise represented. They allowed us to take part in the theoretical struggle in a way we could not have dreamed of doing individually. We did not join in order to fight for leadership, but to take part in the class struggle. Many activists today are anti-party because of horrible experiences in Trotskyist and Stalinist organizations, and because they have nothing else to measure this experience against. I can sympathize with this, even if the working class and revolutionary activists are ever going to run the world, we are going to have to learn to build our own organizations first.

Ultimately, though, whether the working class needs a Leninist party depends on what it wants to accomplish. If one is satisfied with action based essentially by what is acceptable to the class-collaboratorist trade union leaders and reformist social organizations, then one does not need a communist party. If one wants an organization that can rally workers at one workplace after another in struggle, despite the treachery of today's reformist bureaucrats, one that can bring new conceptions to the mass movements, then one will see the desirability of party-building. If one sees the struggle with the trade union bureaucracy as simply a factional struggle for leadership positions, one might imagine that the Trotskyist conception of organization will do. But if one sees the role of the party as greater than that, then the Trotskyist conception has to be set aside.

Non-class Anti-imperialism

Lenin associated anti-imperialism with the struggle of millions upon millions of people for liberation from oppression. When he wrote in *Socialism and War* (1915) that a war between Britain and India was a just war on India's part, regardless of who attacked first, it was because "in China, Persia, India and other dependent countries [...] we have seen during the past decades a policy of rousing tens and hundreds of millions of people." War is the continuation of politics by violent means,

and one judged a war by looking to the politics that had in years preceded that war.

Trotskyism and Stalinism, however, separate anti-imperialism from the mass struggle for freedom. They have become notorious for supporting bloodstained oppressors as anti-imperialists. This is what I call "non-class anti-imperialism," an anti-imperialism without the local masses. The Trotskyist groups have competed in giving "military, [but supposedly] not political" support to these tyrants, such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Qaddafi in Libya, and even the Taliban in Afghanistan. They may denounce these tyrants in extreme language and oppose them up to the moment war breaks out. Still, they claim that during a war with Western imperialism, these tyrants bear the anti-imperialist banner and should be given "military support." They do not see the politics of the war as the continuation of the politics that led to the war.

This is an "anti-imperialism" that goes against the interests of the working people. Their interests are subordinated to the interests of the local tyrants for the duration of the war. The non-class imperialists pretend that it was impossible to support the Iraqi people against both the Saddam Hussein regime and the US imperialist powers. They thought that the intrigues of outside powers were more important than the uprising of the Libyan people to overthrow Qaddafi, who had suppressed all political life in Libya for decades. Now they find similar reasons to oppose the uprising of the Syrian people against the brutal Assad dictatorship.

The various Trotskyist groups have supported non-class anti-imperialism on many of these issues. Trotsky's stand on the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935–1936 has repeatedly been cited as support for this practice. Now, it was essential to back Ethiopia, but Trotsky had a hard time explaining why. He didn't understand the complicated situation facing the masses in Ethiopia, and so ignored it. Instead, in a letter that has become a key part of the Trotskyist canon, he declared that it was necessary to make "a choice between two dictators," Mussolini or Haile Selassie (*On Dictators and the Heights of Oso*, April 22, 1936). He waxed eloquent about the potential greatness of the emperor Haile Selassie, compared Selassie to past revolutionary figures that Trotsky admired, and dreamed that the victory of "The Negus" [the Emperor] would not only be a defeat for Italian imperialism, but for "imperialism as a whole." He even imagined a Selassie victory might serve to spur "the rebellious forces of the oppressed peoples" of the world.

On May 2, 1936, just ten days after Trotsky's comments, Selassie fled Ethiopia for England. Yet Trotsky never reconsidered his position. Neither have his followers. To this day, the Trotskyist movement still regards his comments on Ethiopia as the gold standard for anti-imperialism, and ignores what actually happened there.

As a matter of fact, it was not Selassie who led the continued Ethiopian resistance to occupation; rather, the resistance was continued by the movement called the Patriots. In consequence of their struggle, Italian fascism never conquered the entire Ethiopian countryside. By way of contrast, it was not until 1941 that Selassie, with the help of British bayonets, returned to Ethiopia. The Patriots weren't a revolutionary movement, but they wanted reforms, not a return to absolutism. Selassie, however, was able to restore his power.

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The anthropocene and freedom

Terrestrial time as political mystification

Timothy W. Luke

THE RECEBT COINAGE of “the Anthropocene” as a technical term of art presents an intriguing intellectual and political puzzle.¹ Arguments for accepting the Anthropocene as a fundamental change in all hitherto experienced human history appear driven less by the hopes to chronicle accurately natural history, than by designs for redirecting how human beings ought to act now. On the one hand, its proponents present themselves as vigilant scientific sentries of individual freedom, declaring alarm as experts on current ecological crises prompt nation-states “to do something” about the destruction that mankind has wrought in the environment for 250 years. At the same time, how individual freedoms will be protected under their watch is less clear. With power and wealth at stake, various networks of scientific and technical experts maneuver with their latest analyses of the Anthropocene to gain authority to manage from above and afar, once again, individual choices and collective efforts to mitigate, or adapt to, rapid climate change. On the other hand, the notion of the Anthropocene remains an on-going theoretical debate in the geophysical and stratigraphical scientific communities.² This aspect of the debate poses the question of whether the unchecked growth of civilization’s products and by-products is, or is not, a world-historical episode of ecological degradation. Do negative human environmental impacts yet exist on a geological time scale and, if they do, what must be done?

Corporate interests, government agencies, and mass publics are concerned about the environment, but their agendas can be at odds. Crutzen, as Kolbert notes, “wants to focus our attention on the consequences of our collective actions—on their scale and permanence. ‘What I hope,’ he says, ‘is that the term “Anthropocene” will be a warning to the world.”³ Crutzen is, however, not the first to sound this alarm. The world has been repeatedly warned about anthropogenic destruction, practically to no avail. In *Man and Nature* (1864), George Perkins Marsh made comparable claims about humanity which fully anticipated this anthropogenic turn. Little serious notice was given to his or other warnings. In the meantime, many degrees of freedom have been lost in these decades of neglect. It is unclear how much environmental damage we would be able to rectify even if political will were not so divided. The question of the Anthropocene and freedom is, in fact, quite disjointed.

Until recently, most social theorists interpreted economic and social development as the “rise of civilization” instead of a “center of catastrophe” for planet Earth.⁴ Still, rapid complex urbanization, and a huge shift of most human households into cities since the late 1990s, has created, in turn, Crutzen’s “Great Acceleration” from webs of new worldwide industrial metabolisms.⁵ The noxious and toxic effects of this Great Acceleration are degrading the environments of most human and nonhuman beings coexisting in these vast cities. Since the Neolithic Revolution, cities have constituted the first major “megamachines,”⁶ and this citification intertwines natural habitats with artificial structures in so many different places that they remix the planet’s artificial and natural ecologies into new hybrid spaces. The Anthropocene is the name some physical scientists now claim must be given to these seemingly permanent, petrified presences in Earth’s geological record.

A pulse of global warming which signaled an end to the last Ice Age began around 20,000 years ago, but it was preceded by slightly rising levels of CO₂ in the Earth’s atmosphere.⁷ The advent of citification in some human communities from 11,000 to 4,000 years ago also coincides with the first major leap in the rates of atmospheric greenhouse gassing, not matched until the past decade.⁸ The proliferation of hydrocarbon-fueled machine systems now adds greater complexity to the “citificate” (city-based) loadings of the environment. Here again, the freedom to choose in the era of Man is disjointed. Burning fossil fuel energy to improve one’s life immediately may succeed, but in the long run, noxious by-products will degrade the environment and attenuate, if not undo, those improvements attained through industrialization.

The concentration of “carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has jumped 41 percent since the Industrial Revolution began in the 18th century.”⁹ Fossil fuel consumption intensifies this effect, and today’s climate changes are more pronounced: intense heat waves, extreme precipitation events, altered growing seasons, and flooded coastal regions. As Jeremy Shakun, a Harvard research scholar, observes, “We’re just entering a new era in Earth’s history. It will be an unrecognizable new planet in the future.”¹⁰

New Names for the Unrecognizable

At this juncture in the Anthropocene, as Brenner and Schmid argue, there are many curiosities: new scales of urbanization, a blurred rearticulation of urban territories, the disintegration of the hinterland, and an end to wilderness. They agree that

[W]e need first of all new theoretical categories through which to investigate the relentless production and transformation of socio-spatial organization across scales and territories. To this end, a new conceptual lexicon must be created for identifying the wide variety of urbanization processes that are currently shaping the urban world and, relatedly, for deciphering the new emergent landscapes of socio-spatial difference that have been crystallizing in recent decades.¹¹

To understand how economic growth always already adds up to environmental devastation, this critique of the Anthropocene answers Brenner and Schmid’s call with provisional concepts like “urbanatura.”¹²

The flows of material produced and consumed out of, but also within, these zones of urbanatura accumulate in the material and symbolic spaces of cities along with the detrital flows of solid, liquid, and gaseous wastes of technonature. What lies behind us in the distant past

appears less significant than what is being produced and consumed today, because the scale, scope, and severity of urban change in the planet’s extended and intensive citification are unprecedented. Efforts by social ecological system (SES) managers to calibrate a strategic “degrowth” return to the spatialities of 1990, 1970, or 1950 are likely to fail, even if there were trustworthy tools for making that return.¹³ These new terrains of urbanatura present uncertain, but familiar “Anthropoceneries” of citification naturalized and/or nature citified: corporate-owned seed and genetically engineered fish, plastic-laden oceans and soil-burdened rivers, accelerating extinctions and evolving machine intelligence, rising seas and retreating ice fields, drought-stricken regions and inundated coastal zones, dying megafauna and post-antibiotic microbial diseases, continental urban sprawls and miniscule remote wildernesses, light-polluted night and exhaust-polluted day. At this juncture, the stark fact of endless accumulation by a select few in return for the misery of multitudes is being mystified by new sustainability and resilience discourses about sacrifice, limits, and austerity.

Touring the Anthropocenery

The Anthropocene, if its professional-technical proponents prevail in the still raging conflicts of categorization and classification, does not comprise the whole Holocene. Rather it marks an Age of Citification whose arcological traces appear in many geophysical registers, as the urban regions of the planet reprocess ever vaster areas into technonature. For millennia before the advent of the planet’s extraordinary growth in citification, the hominid species of primates populated the planet. Yet, their ecological impact during early Holocene, Pleistocene, and prior geological eras was minimal. Only when extensive agriculture and agglomerated shelter persist in enduring human settlements can the evidentiary basis for something like “the Anthropocene” emerge from the startling fusion of architectures and ecologies in arcologies. Whether there is an early, middle, and late Anthropocene remains a case study for anthropologists, geologists, paleobotanists, and stratigraphers to hash out. If they conclude it does exist, and its existence is typified by this or that set of characteristics, those methodological quarrels will persist in those sciences.¹⁴

How and why the idea of the Anthropocene is being touted now by other policy-centered scientific communities, like atmospheric chemistry, conservation biology, soil science, physical geography, applied climatology, or public administration, is a much more directly political question about “Earth management.” To the extent that this idea of the Anthropocene becomes a writ of empowerment to preside over the declaration, and then implementation of, an ecological state of emergency, its significance is hardly limited to specialists within the academy. “Letting go” of 1960s-era ecological catastrophism has many political dimensions. Most significantly, “the deciders” in charge of adapting to rapid climate change would be empowered to “right-size” carbon-intensity, growth prospects, and participation in global cosmopolitan society for the few, while the same ecomanagerialist schemes will engineer decarbonization, degrowth, and deglobalization in everyday life for the many.¹⁵

The incentive to popularize and politicize the Anthropocene concept during the current crisis is an invaluable ideological mystification. It turns a scientific system of geological time measurement, or stratigraphy, into a legitimization engine for those seeking to generate new knowledges as well as acquire greater powers to combat ecological crisis, which the concept of the Anthropocene now supposedly best represents.¹⁶ Popularizing this concept stokes an uneasy sense of considerable peril in order to justify scientific declarations of ecological emergency, but it also could serve ultimately to normalize this moment of crisis as yet another survivable episode in the chronicles of human history if adaptive collaborative Earth management is given free rein.

Earth System Science (ESS) is central to the analysis of these changes, and the partnerships of the IGBP (International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme), IHDP (International Human Dimensions Programme), WCRP (World Climate Research Programme) and DIVERSITAS (International Programme of Biodiversity Science) are just one cluster of organized expert initiatives intent upon developing ESS discourse as a means of navigating the Anthropocene. Without saying it as directly as Marx, if the Anthropocene is the “Age of Man,” the figure of “Man” at work in these networks of earth scientists is not all of humanity as such, but a mystified face of humanity. The human in such Anthropocenic assessments, is the technological, scientific, modern, commercial, and acquisitive agent at work in the projects of Western nation-building, empire-expansion, and capitalist-development. Crutzen’s concept of “Anthropocene” offers true insight in the anthropocenic instant of the present, but then this insight is falsely abstracted as a “natural” geological epoch, as if there was no other choice or option except for the present to have developed exactly as it has out of the past 250 years. Anthropocene conceptualizations never quite know whether to bemoan and celebrate these chronocentric and ethnocentric figurations of “Man” as a truly world-historical force of creative destruction.

The discourse of truth, operating on the basis of such anthropocenic applications in Earth System Science, appears ready to serve as a tool box for planet management by generating policy-ready findings for new waves of allegedly sustainable development. As Ehlers and Krafft maintain, this project is immense and imperative. While it will be global in scope and authority, its implementation will be more local: “Earth System Science has to provide place-based information by analyzing global and regional processes of Global Change and by translating the research findings into policy relevant results.”¹⁷ To date, this knowledge is not leading to clear political plans about “what ought to be done,” because

those engaged in this research consign such decisions to policy-makers. Green public intellectuals, like Al Gore, Thomas Berry, or Bill McKibben, recommend improbably immense and rapid reductions of energy, material, and land use levels to match those of all humanity in 1990, 1970, 1950, or even some earlier point in time. Yet, as most realize, the politics of voluntary material sacrifice is not workable as a policy recommendation.

Stuck at this impasse, the most common normative advice for living better in the Anthropocene resorts to the demand to embrace “sustainable development.” Despite their green pretensions, sustainable development practices focus on sustaining development rather developing sustainability—and, in any case, they have decisively failed to do either. *Our Common Future* propounded directives to enjoy the benefits of development up to the point that it will not compromise the ability of future generations to have that same opportunity.¹⁸ Nevertheless, today’s opportunities are grim. The best science on greenhouse gases, for example, suggests that 350 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere is the tipping point for halting global warming trends. Regrettably, this threshold was identified in 1987–1988, and then exceeded during 1990 by 4.35 ppm with regard to global greenhouse gas emissions. 350 ppm still is considered the safest limit, as James Hansen testified before Congress in 1988. Rather than abiding by the WCED’s 25-year-old moral injunctions, scientists are still quarreling with policy makers, who dispute their findings or reject their recommendations *in toto*. What once was a sincere appeal to radically restructure industrial civilization by developing sustainably has, in turn, morphed into a corporate chamber of commerce homily for lean and clean growth. Yet, atmospheric CO₂ levels measured at Hawaii’s Mauna Loa Observatory stood at 395.5 ppm during January 2013 and will exceed 400 ppm by 2014.¹⁹

Finding ways to adaptively manage the energy economy of human cities and societies now is the core of ESS, as it grounds itself in the Anthropocene concept. Reexamining today’s liberal democratic capitalism returns one, at the same time, to the “practices envisaged simultaneously as a technological type of rationality and as strategic games of liberties” as they play out in global citification’s systems of systems.²⁰ These grids create some purportedly right disposition for freedoms embedded in large, energy-intensive, technological systems, but, they burn oil, gas, and coal energy to fuel material consumption, attain ever deeper levels of mass consumption, and, as a side effect, boost greenhouse gas emissions. How “development” might become sustainable is inextricably linked to the question of access to hydrocarbon fossil fuels.²¹ In the absence of a workable alternative to austerity, the only imaginable future for politics will be the determination of *which* people get to create new environmental effects with geological import on this Anthropocenic scale, and where, when, and how they will benefit. This means freedom for the few, and more unfreedom for the many.

A great deal is obscured by ideas like “the Anthropos,” “Man,” or “Humanity,” as the agent behind, responsible for, and in charge of today’s environmental crises. It is not “Man” as such, but rather only a relatively few people who are in any position to structure the planet’s evolving social formations; at present the arcological systems they devise are more toxic and unsustainable than previously. Meanwhile, the many suffer considerably in the citifications of urbanatura, while these few benefit tremendously.²²

Such relations of unequal exchange historically are regarded as the core of “human progress.” Yet, they rely upon the proliferation of new markets for more energy and material whose citified byproducts are proving increasingly destructive. Ironically, seven billion people can survive now on Earth only because of these urban logistical capabilities (albeit very unequally distributed by class, region, and neighborhood), but the byproducts of these operations are degrading urbanatura’s carrying capacities and the survival of terrestrial life itself. Some radical environmentalists urge us to return to the Pleistocene.²³ This may be possible for a few hundred thousand, or even a few million, and yet these urbicidal proposals, if seriously undertaken, would condemn the masses even more assuredly than does the current process of development.

The coevolutionary mixes of the Earth with mangles of urbanizing forces express themselves as the urbanatura of fished-out oceans, polluted skies, nutrient-depleted farmlands, destroyed species, hybridized plants, and over-timbered forests. The unfixed boundaries between Nature and Humanity are continually being relabeled—even radically so—and yet, it seems, only in a nightmarish direction. As Neil Roberts maintains about the Holocene, “in reality many ecosystems are far from being wholly ‘natural,’ and instead owe their distinctive character to particular manners of land use or other human actions... for most ecosystems it is therefore effectively impossible to study environmental history separate from cultural history, and vice versa.”²⁴ In this respect, these times of the Anthropocene could be regarded as another frantic attempt to mystify what Joachim Radkau has aptly characterized as “the deepest rupture in the history of the environment,” namely, “the failed Americanization of the world.”²⁵ **|P**

1. Another version of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the Western Political Science Association, March 27–30, 2013.

See Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “Have we Entered the ‘Anthropocene’?” Global Change 41, International Geophysical-Biosphere Programme. Available online at <http://www.igbp.net/news/opinion/opinion/haveweenteredtheanthropocene.5.d8b4c3c12bf3be638a8000578.html>. Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in 2000 asserted humanity has become a geological and ecological force in Nature of sufficient magnitude to alter the collective experience of geological time. That is, they assert:

To assign a more specific date to the onset of the “anthropocene” seems somewhat arbitrary, but we propose the latter part of the 18th century, although we are aware that alternative proposals can be made (some may even want to include the entire Holocene). However, we choose this date because, during the past two centuries, the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable. This is the period when data retrieved from glacial ice cores show the beginning of a growth in atmospheric concentrations of several “greenhouse gases,” in particular CO₂ and CH₄. Such a starting date also coincides with James Watt’s invention of the steam engine in 1784.

The Anthropocene is essentially a concept in a state of continuous (re)manufacture after being popularized by Paul Crutzen and others after 2000. Like most facts, it is being made rather than discovered as more peak science networks are legitimizing

and mobilizing the term. As Smithsonian magazine observed in 2012, “This year, the word [‘Anthropocene’] picked up velocity in elite science circles: It appeared in nearly 200 peer-reviewed articles, the publisher Elsevier has launched a new academic journal titled Anthropocene and IUGS [International Union of Geological Sciences] convened a group of scholars to decide by 2016 whether to officially declare that the Holocene is over and the Anthropocene has begun.” See Joseph Stromberg, “What is the Anthropocene and Are We in It?” available online at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/What-is-the-Anthropocene-and-are-we-in-it-183828201.html>

2. See Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, Alan Haywood, and Michael Ellis, “The Anthropocene: A New Epoch in Geological Time,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* (March 13 2011), 369.

3. Elizabeth Kolbert, “Enter the Anthropocene: Age of Man,” in *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life* (New York: Punctum Books, 2013).

4. See the Preface to Paolo Soleri, *The Urban Ideal: Conversations with Paolo Soleri*, ed. John Strohmeyer and Jeffrey Cook (Berkeley: Berkeley Hills Books, 2001), and Timothy W. Luke, *Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, Economy, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

5. See Crutzen, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene: Emerging Issues and Problems*, eds. Eckart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2010). Mike Davis, *Planets of Slums* (London: Verso, 2008); and, Timothy W. Luke, “‘Global Cities’ vs. ‘global cities’: Rethinking Contemporary Urbanism as Public Ecology,” *Studies in Political Ecology*, 71 (2003): 11–22.

6. See Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1934).

7. Justin Gillis, “Study of Ice Age Bolsters Carbon and Warming Link,” *New York Times* (March 1, 2013): A4.

8. Gillis, “Global Temperatures Highest in 4,000 Years,” *New York Times* (March 8, 2013): A15.

9. Gillis, “Study of Ice Age.”

10. Cited in *Ibid*.

11. Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, “Planetary Urbanization,” in *Urban Constellations*, ed. Matthew Gandy (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2011).

12. Reality does not just exist. Its tones and textures as such must be made, and then they are remade in use. Once realities are wrought, its wrighting also inscribes its (re)recognitions in all who read the right writings. Every day, in all of the ways that language captures and contains meaning, its textual totalities stabilize what people believe actually “is” and ideally “ought to be” through the discursive representations of such ontographies. It matters immensely to ask, “Who makes these representations? For whom? Deploying what processes of production?” See Timothy W. Luke, “Property Boundaries/Boundary Properties in Technonature Studies: Inventing the Future,” *Environments, Technologies, Spaces, and Places in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Damian F. White and Chris Wilbert (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 173–213.

13. Eckhart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft. *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene: Emerging Issues and Problems* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2010).

14. Paleolithic human cultures (2.6 million to 10,000 BCE) already were capable of altering the biosphere dramatically on a regional, and then more global, basis. As they spread out of Africa 100,000 to 130,000 BCE, the first Homo sapiens clearly beset the world’s large populations of prehistoric avian and mammalian megafauna. Many species were quickly hunted to extinction, and fire was used on landscapes as an environmental management technology to facilitate human hunting and gathering in pursuit of those fauna that survived. Homo erectus had been thriving for nearly 2 million years BCE, using stone tools to hunt animals and fire to create better hunting grounds. By 30,000 BCE, Homo sapiens were dispersed nearly all around the world, and a systematic adoption of various methods to maintain agrarian settlements had become more common between 15,000 and 8,500 BCE. In Mesopotamia, Jericho was flourishing with a population of a few thousands around 6,500 BCE, while Sumer sustained nearly 50,000 residents by 3,500 BCE. As the Mesolithic era gave way to the Neolithic Revolution, it is apparent that “the beginning of sedentary modes of food production—the intensified domestication of plants and animals—was a momentous occurrence in human prehistory... 10,000 years ago almost all human societies lived by hunting and gathering; 8,000 years later, hunter-gather societies were a distinct minority.” (Franz Browswimmer, *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species* [London: Pluto Press, 2002].)

15. Frances Westley, et al, “Tipping Toward Sustainability: Emerging Pathways of Transformation,” *Ambio* 40 (7) (November 2011): 762–780.

16. The “Anthropos” of the Anthropocene, however, is a strange reified construct. Just as Marx mapped the trope of “Man” in his “On the Jewish Question” or Engels probed in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, its agency and subjectivity rests in the same political economy which Engels characterized as that “science of enrichment born of the merchant’s mutual envy and greed” rooted in “despicable immorality” (Quoted in Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* [New York: Norton, 1978], xxviii). Marx’s vision of Man, then, triangulates itself against the duplicities of seeking personal enrichment in the realm of civil society and global markets along with collective empowerment of the bourgeois class in the domain of the state.

The Anthropos, or “Man,” is a social being enfolded in very recent times framed by states and civil societies with all their mythic qualities. The egoistic existence of all men is tied to the capitalist forces animating economic “Man.” Marx here asserts that the double-dealing of modernity comes into full play:

Where the political state has attained to its full development, man leads, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in reality, in life, a double existence—celestial and terrestrial. He lives in the political community, where he regards himself as a communal being, and in civil society where he acts simply as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. (Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, [New York: Norton, 1978], 34)

Unexpectedly, even ironically, species-being for humans in the Holocene appears as this archetypical “Man.” Crutzen and Stoermer, as they date the most noticeable effects of human activities globally in their “Anthropocenery,” are addressing the humans caught in these same containers of agency—the state and civil society—in which their relations as communal beings and private individuals are the egoisms of a doubled existence pitched at treating other men as means.

17. Ehlers and Krafft, 10.

18. World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987].

19. See “Trends in Carbon Dioxide” on the website of the Earth System Research Laboratory’s Global Monitoring Division, <http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/ccgg/trends>

20. Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984), 40.

21. Hence, humans degrade themselves willingly and unwillingly